

“Jesus Is Calling You!”  
*Luke 5:1-11, 4:38-39a & Psalm 25:1-10a*  
Pastor James York  
February 18, 2024

**Prayer for Understanding** Creator God, You hear everything. You hear the rush of the wind through the trees. You hear a baby’s first cry. You hear the crickets chirping, our silent prayers, and laughter around tables. You hear it all! We don’t need that same capacity, but we do need to hear your Word, O God, for we cannot live on bread alone. So today we pray: give us the ability to truly listen. Give us the ability to listen with our hearts, and may the truths revealed in your scripture today change us. With hearts full of gratitude we pray, Amen.

Lent is a season for alignment with God. Pastor Sarah Speed writes: “I have never tuned a piano, but I understand it takes hours. Small notes plucked repeatedly, like rain on a tin roof. Some things cannot be rushed. Some things require a steady hand, a listening ear, and the intimacy of familiarity. Tuning an instrument and falling in love are both like that. Maybe that is why we pray to God, “Tune my heart,” because we are desperate to be pulled into alignment. We are desperate to add our voice to the song, to get lost in a dance, to be in harmony with the melody of the universe. I’ve never tuned a piano before, but still I pray: Pull me into alignment. Show me the notes to sing.”

This Lent, we are focusing on the journey of one of Jesus’ disciples, Simon Peter. In Peter, we see a person who is both steadfast and unsteady, a dear friend and a betrayer, a follower and a wanderer. Peter pushed away from God and Peter was pulled close by God. In Peter, we often see ourselves. By following Peter’s journey, we watch the story of Jesus unfold through the eyes of a person trying to figure it all out—just like us. This Lent we will affirm that life is a constant journey of steadfast pursuit, one that ebbs and flows. Wandering is exploration. We will explore the ways Peter keeps going: he drops his nets, he walks on water, he runs to the empty tomb, he swims to the shore to meet the risen Christ. He keeps searching, yearning and loving, even after numerous missteps and blatant mistakes. Ultimately, in Peter’s story, we are reminded that God loves imperfect people. God claims and calls everyone even prolific sinners, confused wanderers, and frequent betrayers. As we journey, God invites us to tune our hearts to sing God’s grace and rest in streams of healing.

Peter has a wandering heart. His journey is not polished, or linear, or perfect, and he is always tethered to the love of God. In Peter’s story, you find Jesus at each step along the way—offering him abundance, catching him when he begins to sink, challenging him when he stands in the way, washing his feet, predicting his betrayal, and offering him agape, supreme, sacrificial, perfect love. This Lent, we are joining Peter in figuring out life. We are not idolizing or vilifying him; instead, we are hoping to wander alongside Peter, open to what we might learn about Jesus (and ourselves) by stepping in Peter’s shoes. Together let’s wander, learn, and discover fresh facets of redeeming love. We are invited to receive grace and be gracious. Like Peter, we are invited to bring the best and worst parts of ourselves, our whole selves, our messiness, questions, and missteps all with an attitude of adventure, open to possibilities.

Pastor Anna Strickland writes: “My biggest fear has always been making an irreparable mistake. The phrase, “You only live once!” has always made me anxious. What if I could view my own wandering path with compassion? What if I could let go of my anxiety about reaching an imagined destination and enjoy the journey instead? What if I could lay down my perfectionism? Maybe Peter can teach me about wandering.”

Jesus calls everyone. Jesus got Peter’s attention by healing his mother-in-law. Luke explains: **Luke 4:38-39a NLT “After leaving the synagogue that day, Jesus went to Simon’s home, where Jesus found Simon Peter’s mother-in-law very sick with a high fever. “Please heal her,” everyone begged. Standing at her bedside, Jesus rebuked the fever, and it left her.”**

Jesus gets Peter’s attention again by teaching and assisting in fishing. Then Jesus calls Peter. Luke continues: **Luke 5:1-11 NLT “One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of**

Galilee, great crowds pressed in on Jesus to listen to the word of God. Jesus noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishers had left them and were washing their nets. Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there. When Jesus had finished speaking, Jesus said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish." "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again." And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking. When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man." For Simon was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed. Jesus replied to Simon Peter, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!" And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus."

Peter had just witnessed Jesus heal his mother-in-law, why does he doubt Jesus' guidance in fishing? God's love has been steadfast from the beginning of time. Hopefully, you have personally experienced love, joy and peace, all aspects of God blessing you. Do you, like Peter, sometimes still doubt God's promises, that God is doing marvelous things through you, that God is expanding the love of the cosmos through you, that everyone and all will be redeemed by God's amazing grace?

Why does Peter respond to the abundant catch of fish with, "**Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man.**" Does he feel unworthy to receive a gift he has not worked hard for? Is he afraid there could be repercussions from the Roman government, and that this abundant catch may lead to higher taxes and fines for his business? As a Galilean fisher who likely lived scarcely, does seeing this abundance feel jarring and unfamiliar? Does he consider himself "unfaithful" and therefore he resists being in Jesus' presence? What else is going on here? When have you been offered an abundant gift? Did you feel any urge to resist it? If so, why?

Jesus replies: "Do not be afraid!" which is the most repeated command in scripture. Peter responded by leaving everything and following Jesus. This is a dramatic turning point for Peter. He leaves his home, his business, and his way of life to follow Jesus into a new calling. Have you ever pivoted your life in order to follow a new calling? What did you leave behind? How did that new path unfold? When was the first time you felt God's presence? How do you resist God's call? How do you follow?

Does following Jesus involve naming our fears? Letting God wash away our fear and giving us an attitude of adventure to follow Jesus? Do you trust that God is continually guiding you into ever grandeur love, joy and peace?

Are we, North Presbyterian Church and we the Christian church, being called to name our fears and let them go, to let go of the past, let go of the familiar ways of being church, so we are free to follow God's will for the next chapter of God in relation with humanity? Is God calling us to find our collective voice to tell our story in a way that honors the past and is open to the future? Do we as a church trust that God is continually guiding us into ever grandeur love, joy, and peace? Even now when the change is fast, sweeping, and radical and no one knows what the church will look like in a few years, are you trusting God? Are you willing to follow Peter's example of laying down the net, letting go of the familiar, to follow God into a completely unknown, unforeseeable, radically different future?

Perhaps the psalmist prayerful song will guide us. **Psalm 25:1-10a NLT "O Lord, I give my life to you. I trust in you, my God! Do not let me be disgraced, or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat. No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced, but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others. Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you. Remember, O Lord, your compassion and unfailing love, which you have shown from long ages past. Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth. Remember me in the light of your unfailing love, for you are merciful, O Lord. The Lord is good and does what is right; God shows the proper**

**path to those who go astray. God leads the humble in doing right, teaching them God's way. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness."**

"All This Time"

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

I put my headphones in.

I walk quickly.

I look toward the ground.

I create one million barriers of independence, and still God seeks after me.

God leans a rainbow over the sky.

God sends sun after the rain.

God blankets the earth with wildflowers.

God allows music to carry and laughter to rise,

all so that I might notice.

And when I do notice,

the unfurling that begins in my soul is slow and holy and burning.

I am not alone.

God has been chasing after me all this time.

Art conveys an array of insights and typically unique insights for each person. Look at the art on the bulletin cover portraying today's scripture. We will take a minute of silence to be inspired. What do you perceive? What is God inviting you to do or be through this art?

The artist Pastor Lisle Gwynn Garrity writes: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8) As we begin Lent, this desperate confession introduces us to Peter, the disciple whose story—and wandering heart—we will follow for the next 7 weeks. Peter was a commercial fisher; his business partners were Andrew (his brother) as well as Zebedee and his two sons. Based in Galilee, Peter was most likely bilingual, speaking Aramaic and Greek. Culturally, he was immersed in Judaism and Hellenism. Peter's business would have been under oppressive control of the Roman government, which arbitrarily imposed harsh rental and harbor fees, fishing licenses, and taxes on domestic fishers. Peter was likely a blue-collar worker daily constrained by tides and taxes. With this backstory in mind, we may hear Peter's response to the abundant catch of fish with fresh ears. There are so many messages within his protest: "I'm not prepared. I'm not capable. I'm not deserving. I'm not faithful enough. I'm not smart enough. I'm not the type you're looking for." Have you ever found yourself saying these things in response to a new calling, or to an abundant gift of grace? In this image, the bursting nets transform into a river of grace meandering through the composition of Peter's life. The river pours into Peter's hands, but he can't quite grasp the fullness of this gift and calling quite yet, and so most of it rushes right by. As you will see in my other pieces for this series, this river of grace will wander alongside Peter throughout his life. The river represents how Peter's journey with Christ begins and ends with an abundant catch of fish. Peter is forever tethered to the overflowing love of God. The river is a symbol of Peter's gifts, as God uses what Peter knows how to do well (being a fisher of fish) and invites him to apply his skills to a new calling (being a fisher of people). It's a visible reminder of the ways God's grace bends and turns and rushes to find each of our wandering hearts. Despite Peter's resistance, grace seeks him out. His right thumb gets caught in the net. He can't escape the fact that God's goodness and mercy will pursue him all the days of his life. The river rushes in. The question for Peter—and for each of us—is will he follow where it leads?"

Do not be afraid. What nets are God calling you to drop so you are freer to follow? As you float in God's river of grace how is God calling you to utilize a gift you have in new ways to share God's grace? How is God tuning you? How is God calling you? Amen